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ABSTRACT

This document is a combined version of two papers originally presented at a 1990 European seminar on quality in services to young children. The papers, which considered the definition of quality in child services and the topics of quality assurance and monitoring, respectively, were revised in the light of comments made during and after the seminar in order to produce a single discussion document. In its discussion of quality in child services, the document takes into consideration the viewpoints of children, parents, and professionals, and examines quality in child services from a broad and value-based perspective, rather than a perspective that stresses limited and quantitative measures of quality. Criteria for measuring quality in child service programs are organized into 10 areas: (1) accessibility and use; (2) physical environment; (3) learning activities; (4) relationships among children and adults involved in the service program; (5) parents' views; (6) the program's relationship to the community; (7) diversity; (8) assessment of children's progress; (9) costs; and (10) the ethos of the program. Issues relating to quality assurance in child service programs are also organized into 10 areas: policy; legislation and standards; financing; planning and monitoring; advisory and support services; staffing; training; physical resources; research and development; and coordination of services. For each of the areas considered in the document, a series of key questions is provided. (BC)

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# QUALITY IN SERVICES FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

A DISCUSSION PAPER

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EUROPEAN COMMISSION CHILDCARE NETWORK

# QUALITY IN SERVICES FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

**A DISCUSSION PAPER**

**Irene Balageur** **Juan Mestres** **Helen Penn**

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COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR EMPLOYMENT, INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS

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Cover photo taken at Brussels' English Primary School

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# INTRODUCTION

This discussion paper - **Quality in Services for Young Children** - has been produced for the European Commission Childcare Network. The Network was established in 1986 as part of the Commission's Second Equal Opportunities Programme. The Network consists of an expert from each Member State and a Co-ordinator. It is concerned with a broad range of childcare issues which affect the reconciliation of employment and family responsibilities and equality of opportunity for women including services for children, employment rights for parents and participation by men in the care of children. From its beginning, the Network has emphasised that childcare services must be of good quality as well as sufficient in number.[1]

This paper originates from a European Seminar on "Quality in Services to Young Children"[2]; the seminar was funded by the European Commission, organised by the Childcare Network and was held in Barcelona in May 1990. At the seminar, two papers were presented for discussion - one on defining quality in services, the other on quality assurance and monitoring. These papers were written jointly by Irene Balageur and Juan Mestres from Barcelona, Spain and Helen Penn from Strathclyde Region in Scotland, UK. The ideas discussed in the papers arose in the first instance out of daily practice. Within Strathclyde and Barcelona, there has been a significant attempt to articulate and define the aims and objectives of services, to develop and improve them, and to monitor and regulate the outcome. These developments have been widely discussed at local and national forums in Spain and in the UK.

Despite linguistic, cultural and other major differences between Catalonia and Scotland, the authors were able to arrive at a common perspective on quality and quality assurance - a good example of European collaboration. Although there were some individual reservations on particular points, there was widespread support for this perspective at the seminar, and general agreement that the papers formed a valuable basis for stimulating and informing debate about quality. The authors were asked by the Network to revise their original papers, in the light of comments made during and after the seminar, and to produce a discussion document. This paper is the result of that work.

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1 For further details of the Network, its programme of work and its publications, contact the European Commission (DGV/B/4), 200 rue de la Loi, B-1049 Brussels; or the members of the Network, whose names and addresses are given at the end of this document.

2 A report on the seminar is available free of charge from the European Commission (see address above).

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It is important to note that the seminar produced complete agreement on the need to ensure good quality services and to ensure equal access for all children to these services; and that services for young children were a public issue, with public authorities having a major responsibility - not necessarily to provide services directly, but to ensure adequate resources and other conditions to ensure equal access to good quality provision. The seminar also emphasised the great diversity - of values, structures, policies and provision of services - between and within Member States; this discussion paper attempts to recognise this diversity and its implications for discussions about quality.

This paper has grown from wide ranging discussions at many levels, involving many people. It is intended to stimulate and assist the development of definitions of quality and strategies for promoting quality. The **process** of defining quality is important in its own right, providing the opportunity for values, ideas, knowledge and experience to be shared, examined and better understood. This paper is intended to be a resource for that process.

The Childcare Network welcomes comments on this discussion paper and, more generally, on the definition and promotion of quality. Comments will be very helfpul in the development of further work on quality, which will be undertaken by the Network as part of the European Commission's Third Equal Opportunities Programme.

**Please send your comments either to the Network Coordinator or your national representative on the Network; names and addresses are given at the end of this document.**

**Peter Moss**

Co-ordinator, EC Childcare Network

# QUALITY IN SERVICES FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

There are three major perspectives in looking at quality: that of the **children themselves;** the views of **parents and family**; and the perspective of the **professionals** directly or indirectly looking after the children.

The perspective of the **children** must usually be inferred by the adults responsible for them. For babies this is difficult to do. Although there may be gross signs of distress or pleasure, for very young children mood or volition has to be guessed, and the emphasis for judging quality tends to be on physical standards such as warmth, cleanliness and nutrition and attentiveness to distress and crying. For slightly older children, the picture gradually changes and the child's own happiness and articulated wishes are likely to be a major consideration for parents in choosing services, that is where choice exists. However, as indicated below, happiness is an elusive quality to try to measure!

**Parents** are not a homogeneous group. Although they may have common interests, they are as individual as their children. A parent may have different criteria from professionals. For example she may consider maintaining family income as a priority for family stability, and therefore seek daycare - whereas professionals may argue that other forms of care are more appropriate for her child. Parents from a black community may feel strongly that white professionals do not fully understand the pressures and oppressions that their children experience. A parent might have a decided view about gender - about the right way to bring up boys and girls - which conflicts with professional opinion. There may be differences about discipline and if and how children should be punished. Professionals sometimes argue that by virtue of their training and experience they have the best interests of the child at heart, and are in a better position to judge than parents what is best.

**Professionals**, because of their training, tend to hold more similar views amongst themselves. Professional groups who are organized into associations or unions are in a position to present their views with more authority or influence. But they may also differ amongst themselves, according to whether they are committed to an educational approach or a health and care approach, or whether they are researchers or grass roots practitioners. The lack of coherence in services is often reflected in the different perceptions of different professional groups.

Any definition of quality is to an extent transitory; understanding quality and arriving at quality indicators is a **dynamic** and **continuous process** of reconciling the emphases of different interest groups. It is **not** a prescriptive exercise. On the other hand it needs to be a detailed exercise which is of direct practical use to those working with young children.

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How do we view children? What kind of expectations do we hold? What kind of children do we want? What kind of weighting do we put on children being happy, and how do we recognize that happiness? Assumptions about what children need and how adults might provide it have varied widely even this century. Very generally, however, there is a consensus in much of the current child development and education literature that children need to feel loved, respected and listened to; that they are sociable and enjoy the company of other children and adults besides their immediate family; and that through affection, through social intercourse, and with a stimulating environment, they mature, learn and develop a remarkably wide range of skills and competencies in the first five or six years. This learning and development assumes a basic level of physical well-being.

We can therefore make informed guesses about what young children need. But our understanding is relative and is coloured by our wider social perceptions and values. **We recognize that in stating the needs of children we are also making a statement about our own beliefs.** Hence our insistence on the relativity of definitions of quality, and the importance of **discussion and debate** to clarify those definitions and to explore the value judgements implicit in them. It is part of the broader role of those involved in services for young children not only to encourage and sustain discussions in the wider community about the needs of children and set agendas within services themselves, but to act as **advocates on the behalf of young children and their needs**.

**We believe** that high quality services for young children should aim to ensure that children have the opportunity to experience:

- **a healthy life**
- **spontaneous expression**
- **esteem as an individual**
- **dignity and autonomy**
- **self-confidence and zest in learning**
- **a stable learning and caring environment**
- **sociability, friendship, and co-operation with others**
- **equal opportunities irrespective of gender, race and disability**
- **cultural diversity**
- **support as part of a family and a community**
- **happiness.**

These aims are value-based; they reflect our beliefs. We are aware that these aims are very general and are in themselves open to further discussion; (some of them are part of a

philosophical discourse which can be traced back to Ancient Greece!). Despite this generality, we consider it a necessary step to ask what components in services to young children might lead to these very broad ends? In Part 3 of this paper, we suggest that there are a number of **indicators of quality** which might enable us to measure whether these value-based aims are being translated into practice.

We are aware that the traditions of developmental psychology, and of North American researchers in particular, tend to stress more limited and more quantitative measures of quality, usually organisational or environmental features which can be shown to have a relationship with certain developmental outcomes for children. For instance, in reviewing American literature, Alison Clarke-Stewart identifies several indicators of quality, including a well organized and stimulating physical environment; a responsive and trained care-giver; a balanced curriculum; relatively small groups of children and relatively generous adult-child ratios. She argues that "because of the finding that the relation between these dimensions of quality and child development outcomes is curvilinear, it is probably more important at least in the short run to put our efforts into ensuring that all day care programmes meet minimal acceptable standards (for group-class size, ratio, care-giver training) than in trying to improve the quality of already adequate care".[3]

These conclusions reflect a particular academic tradition, that of experimental psychology. They have been arrived at through a methodology which is reliant on very sophisticated quantitative criteria. They involve no discussion of the values which inform the choice of objectives and criteria - the researchers' values remain implicit - nor any recognition that values may not always be shared by all those with an interest in services. Whilst useful in certain contexts, this approach does not reflect the complexity of daily life which families with young children experience, nor the full range of needs, perspectives and objectives which services might recognise and attempt to meet. Nor does it touch upon the equally important issue of quality assurance.

We have therefore chosen to take a different approach from setting and monitoring minimum standards as indicators of quality. Given the diversity of services across Member States, we recognize that individual countries may feel it appropriate to set such minimum standards, particularly where there is a large private and voluntary sector. These standards may provide a minimum guarantee, that the safety and adequate development of children is ensured, a worthwhile but limited ambition. Our broader aim is to engender discussion and provide a focus for debating high quality services, to look at what we might try to achieve to put our beliefs and values about children into practice.

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3 Clarke-Stewart, A. (1991) "Day care in the USA", in P. Moss and E. Melhuish (eds.) *Current Issues in Day Care for Young Children*, London: HMSO.

Our discussion of quality acknowledges a diversity of circumstances and a diversity of perspectives or values. As a consequence, the priority given to the indicators presented below may vary; in some cases, certain of our indicators may be rejected altogether or alternative indicators may be developed. We present broad categories of quality in the form of a series of open questions, rather than as a prescriptive format. They could be used as a basis for developing scales or ratings in particular settings, or even for setting minimum standards, but the process of developing them in this way should also be part of their usage. Indeed, we believe that the process involved in defining quality - with the opportunity it provides to explore and discuss values, objectives and priorities - is of the utmost importance, and can be lost where people simply adopt existing measures.

We should stress that our approach is not entirely open-ended. We believe that certain objectives must be met. It is not acceptable to do nothing. There was a unanimous consensus at the seminar which gave rise to this discussion paper that quality of services to young children is a public issue, and that equality of access to high quality of services is part of the definition of quality which we have adopted.

To summarize our position: we have proposed a value base for services for young children and a methodology for discussing how such values might be translated into practice, bearing in mind the diversity and complexity of services in each Member State. We discuss firstly what the criteria for quality might be, and secondly what action needs to be taken to ensure such quality is achieved, and equality of access for all children is secured.

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# CRITERIA FOR QUALITY

We have organised our indicators of quality into 10 areas or blocks. We stress that these areas are inter-related, and that there is no hierarchy of preference or priority within them; different people may attach different priority to them and some may even reject some areas altogether and propose others. The indicators in each area, expressed as questions, are by no means exhaustive, but provide some indication of the kind of issues which might be explored.

## A. ACCESSIBILITY AND USAGE

This first set of criteria examines the process of entry to services, and the adaptability and flexibility of the service to individual family needs.

- **How easy is it for a child to gain access to a particular service?**
- **What kinds of admissions procedures are involved?**
- **What priorities are imposed?**
- **Who controls admissions?**
- **Are appeals possible against decisions which have been made?**
- **Does the parent have problems about affordability of the service?**
- **Is it easy to travel from home to the service?**
- **Is negotiation possible about hours attended, or about days attended?**
- **How flexible or rigid are the routines of the nursery or childcare setting?**

## B. ENVIRONMENT

This set of criteria examines different aspects of the physical environment of services, and covers a wide range of factors from health and safety to aesthetics.

- **Are the surroundings inside and outside safe?**
- **Do they promote health?**
- **Do they guard against obvious hazards and dangers?**
- **Is there access for children or adults with disabilities?**
- **Are the surroundings attractive and well-designed?**
- **Do they look aesthetically pleasing?**
- **Are the rooms light, airy and warm.**
- **Do they offer varied opportunities for inside and outside play?**
- **Is there suitable space for exercise and rest?**
- **Are the rooms sufficiently spacious to allow free movement but sufficiently cosy for quiet activities and relaxation?**
- **Are the kitchen facilities good?**
- **Are the children allowed any access to the kitchen?**
- **Is the food nutritious?**
- **Is the food attractively presented?**
- **Are mealtimes a pleasure or a chore?**
- **Are the cloakrooms and toilets of a good standard?**
- **Is there adequate storage space?**
- **Is there adequate space for staff?**
- **Is there adequate space for parents?**
- **Is there a lobby area for welcoming visitors and displaying information?**

QUALITY

## C. LEARNING ACTIVITIES

This set of criteria refers to activities which develop and enhance children's cognitive and social development. There is a concensus about the importance of learning in the early years, and an enormous literature about it in most countries. But there is active debate about how such learning can best be fostered. For instance how the learning environment is structured; how much adults should intervene in the learning process or how much activities should be self directed by children; what role other children play in that learning; how much the learning should prefigure the requirements of statutory schooling; what the content of the learning should include; there are many professional opinions on such matters. The criteria we present in this block are very general, and we recognize that they may have already been developed in much more sophisticated ways in different countries.

- **Is there a comprehensive range of activities for the children?**
- **Are there opportunities to develop oral and written linguistic skills?**
- **Are there opportunities to develop bilingual skills?**
- **Are there opportunities to develop basic mathematical concepts?**
- **Are musical expression and musical skills encouraged?**
- **Are artistic skills and aesthetic appreciation encouraged?**
- **Do children have an opportunity to express themselves through play and drama, puppetry and mime?**
- **Is interest in biological and scientific concepts encouraged?**
- **Are there opportunities to develop muscular co-ordination and bodily control?**
- **Do children understand basic concepts of health and hygiene?**
- **Do children understand about food purchase and food preparation?**
- **Do children have an understanding of their local community and the activities which go on in it?**
- **Is the nursery or childcare setting well-equipped with a range of furnishings and activities which promote learning?**
- **Can children negotiate some control over the structure and pace of activities?**

## D. RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships exist at a variety of levels and in many permutations; between adult or care-giver and child; between child and child; and between the adults themselves whose own interaction and comportment inevitably set standards for the children.

- **Do staff or caregivers have knowledge, understanding and experience of child development?**
- **Do they interact with children with warmth and kindness?**
- **Is there consistency of staff with children?**
- **Are relationships stable?**
- **Do individual members of staff develop relationships with particular children and know and understand their personal histories?**
- **How do staff treat children who behave irritably or irritatingly or who are withdrawn?**
- **Do staff respond to the demands, enquiries and requests of children promptly and with respect?**
- **Do staff cope well with special events or emergencies?**
- **Do the staff actively promote learning?**
- **Are there men as well as women as role models?**
- **Do staff emphasize and develop co-operative play and support relationships between children?**
- **Are there child-initiated activities?**
- **Are there adequate opportunities for play amongst children without adult interruptions?**
- **Are there spaces for children to play that are not constantly monitored by adults?**
- **Can children choose who they want to play with?**
- **Are there same-age peers, younger children and older children?**
- **Are brothers and sisters allowed to be companions?**
- **Are relationships between children stable?**
- **Are friendships supported?**
- **Do adults relate well to each other?**
- **Are the adults in hierarchical relationships to one another?**
- **Are there friendships amongst adults?**
- **Do the staff working with the children enjoy their work, feel pleased and confident in it?**
- **Do staff follow instructions without fully understanding or discussing them?**

## E. PARENTS' VIEWS

This set of criteria explores the nature of partnership between parents and those looking after their children. We have used the word "parent" but we are conscious this word is gender-blind and generation blind, and that useful distinctions might be made between mothers and fathers and other close relatives.

- **Are there ways of measuring parents' opinions or views about the childcare setting?**
- **Do parents feel welcome?**
- **Do parents have enough time to leave their child at the beginning and greet their child at the end of a day or session?**
- **Do parents feel they have enough information about the progress of their child?**
- **Are parents able to give information about the progress of their child?**
- **Are parents informed about the daily activities and routines and the reasons for them?**
- **Can parents comment on or contribute to these activities and routines?**
- **Can parents stay or join in mealtimes or some other activity of the nursery or childcare setting?**
- **Are parents involved in discussing or setting the curriculum or programme for the nursery or childcare setting?**
- **Can parents be involved in the management of the nursery or in the selection of staff or in the financial control of resources?**

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## F. THE COMMUNITY

This set of criteria refers to the community. "Community" is a nebulous concept which means more than the immediate neighbourhood and implies overlapping interests and groupings of people and places of which the child is a part. The extent to which the nursery or childcare setting is sensitive to these external influences is also a useful criteria of quality.

- **Is the nursery or childcare setting part of its local community?**
- **Do any of the staff live locally?**
- **Are the interests and priorities of the local environment reflected in daily activities?**
- **Do children visit local facilities?**
- **Do local people who are not parents and staff have an opportunity to visit the nursery or childcare setting?**
- **Are there other activities which go on in the place where the children are being cared for and educated?**
- **Can the children take part in community events or festivals?**

## G. VALUING DIVERSITY

This set of criteria refers to diversity, the extent to which the concept of "normality" is explored and extended and heterogenity accepted.

- **How are issues of gender recognized and accommodated?**
- **How do staff and children deal with race, even if there are no black children or staff/caregivers immediately present?**
- **How are the needs of children, staff or parents with disabilities identified and met?**
- **How sensitive and tolerant are staff and children to individual differences?**
- **Is there a conscious attempt to understand and challenge stereotypes, and to represent and allow for cultural and physical diversity in the materials and equipment which are used in daily activities?**
- **Are extra resources and support available if necessary?**

# H. ASSESSMENT OF CHILDREN AND OUTCOME MEASURES

These criteria refer to measures of childrens' progress and the extent to which specific problems or specific talents are recognized and accommodated.

- **Are children regularly observed?**
- **Is the progress and development of individual children monitored, recorded and discussed?**
- **Is the autonomy and privacy of individual children respected?**
- **Is confidentiality respected?**
- **Are the records available to parents?**
- **Are parents' observations and comments used in the assessment?**
- **Is specialist help available when necessary, either for specific medical or psychological problems or for enabling the development of particular skills such as music or art or swimming?**

QUALITY

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# I. COST BENEFITS

This set of criteria refers to value for money. These are problematic criteria, and we stress the importance of a cost-benefit analysis rather than more crude financial criteria.

- **How are the costs of the nursery or childcare setting calculated?**
- **How are the benefits to parents and children weighted?**
- **Once capital costs are met, are calculations made for rent, rates, insurance, heating and lighting?**
- **Are janitation, domestic, administrative and maintenance costs included?**
- **How are the salaries or payment of those looking after children calculated?**
- **Do costs include adequate resources and replacement of consumable items?**
- **Is there regular cover for staff illness or staff training?**
- **Is staff recruitment included?**
- **Is the food budget adequate for a balanced, varied and attractive diet?**
- **Are costs included for visits and travel of staff and children?**
- **Who meets these costs?**
- **Do parents contribute?**
- **Are some staff unpaid because they are working as volunteers?**
- **Who pays for specialist input?**
- **Are these costs examined in relation to satisfaction of users?**
- **Are costs examined in relation to absentee rates and turnover of staff?**
- **Are costs examined in relation to turnover of children?**
- **Are costs examined in relation to outcome measures for children?**

## J. ETHOS

The ethos and regime of the nursery or childcare setting is the balance of all these quality indicators, the extent to which they are integrated and used in a coherent fashion. The more positive and coherent the programme or organization, the more it is related to the value base, the more likely it is that good quality will be achieved. We restate those values here.

- **Does the nursery or childcare setting promote good health?**
- **Does the nursery or childcare setting encourage children to be spontaneous and express themselves freely?**
- **Does the nursery or childcare setting ensure that children are respected as individuals?**
- **Does the nursery or childcare setting recognize the dignity and autonomy of children?**
- **Does the nursery or childcare setting promote self-confidence and zest in learning?**
- **Does the nursery or childcare setting offer a stable learning and caring environment?**
- **Does the nursery or childcare setting encourage sociability, friendship and co-operation with others?**
- **Does the nursery or childcare setting recognize equal opportunities irrespective of gender, race or disability?**
- **Is cultural diversity fully expressed?**
- **Is the nursery or childcare setting fully sensitive to family and community influences?**
- **Are the children happy?**
- **Does the nursery or childcare setting have a statement of aims and objectives which supports these values?**
- **Do all the staff agree with and support these objectives?**
- **Are there clear strategies for putting these aims and objectives into practice?**
- **Does the organization, routine and programme of activities reflect the aims, objectives and strategies?**
- **Are there factors which work against achieving these aims and objectives?**
- **How accountable is the nursery or childcare setting, and to whom?**
- **What are the criteria?**

# QUALITY ASSURANCE

In the previous section we have attempted to address some of the issues concerning quality of services. In this section we look at quality assurance - what needs to be done at a local and national level to ensure that services meet the quality indicators which are set. Our fundamental assumption is that quality of services also includes equality of access to services.

The competencies or powers of local government are set by the state. In most European countries there is a three tier system, the state, the region, and the city or commune. The powers and service provision of these different tiers may overlap or be in conflict. Some regions may be semi-autonomous, with legislative and revenue raising powers; in other countries there is a very centralized system, and little local autonomy. In some instances there are tensions about the balance between rural and urban needs, or between the claims of big cities and smaller clusters of towns.

There are other complications in legislating for, financing and supporting services to young children, as well as the problems of levels of government. For instance there are considerable differences within Member States about whether politicians hold executive powers, and whether key professional posts are political appointees. There are considerable differences in legal systems, in the reliance on case law and precedent. There are differences about the importance and inviolability of national agreements with trades unions. There are differences in the attention paid to and legal status of guidelines and circulars issued by Ministries. Making major changes in any service, particularly services for young children for whom contradictory histories are the norm, is a complex and sophisticated enterprise. We are concious that the suggestions we make in this section cut roughly across custom and practice. However we feel it is useful to articulate the relevant issues in quality assurance, even if they will necessarily be addressed in different ways in different Member States.

One major area of difference in policy concerns the degree to which the private and voluntary sector is acknowledged and covered by legislation. In almost every Member State a majority of children under three are cared for and educated in the private and voluntary sector. Our view that children should have equal access to high quality services assumes that even where private or voluntary solutions are preferred, issues of quality control, support and monitoring, availability and cost will be addressed in a similar way to that in publicly funded services.

There is therefore a range of views about the role of the government at local and national level in providing services for young children which at one extreme denies all but minimal functions and responsibilities, and at the other, assumes considerable responsibilities. Our view is that equality of access and quality of provision can only be satisfactorily provided where the government at local and national level does assume a major responsibility in funding and supporting

the development of services. The most successful and far reaching quality assurance occurs when the government supports, endorses and encourages - but does not control - local initiatives. The role of government at local and national level is examined in this light.

Our method of working is the same as for quality indicators. We identify a series of areas concerning quality assurance and suggest some key questions which could be asked. As before, our categories are overlapping and relate closely to one another; to some extent their separation as separate points is arbitrary.

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# A. POLICY

Public and published statements of intent affirming the importance and direction of services to young children enable democratic debate and discussion to take place in many different forums; in political forums, professional or trade union forums; in parent or consumer forums.

- **What statement of principles exists at national level?**
- **What statement of principles exists at regional or local level?**
- **How explicit or implicit are these statements?**
- **How specific are the definitions contained in it?**
- **Does the policy reflect the needs of different communities?**
- **Does the policy include the private and voluntary sector?**
- **How is the policy made?**
- **Who is involved in drawing it up?**
- **What weight is the policy given in relation to other policies?**

QUALITY ASSURANCE

## B. LEGISLATION AND SETTING STANDARDS

The debate on policy should set the focus on services to young children, and lead to legislative and fiscal decisions. The legislation at state level at the very minimum needs to outline the competencies of local government in providing services.

- **Does the legislation or decision making at state or local level fully reflect the extent of the policies?**
- **Is the legislation coherent or is it contained in many different acts or separate documents or guidelines?**
- **Are the legal powers of regions and local authorities fully clarified?**
- **Does the legislation set targets for equal levels of services in all areas?**
- **Do the legislation or standards apply equally to the public and the private and voluntary sector?**
- **What kind of penalties exist, if the targets or the standards set are not maintained?**

QUALITY ASSURANCE

## C. FINANCING AND RESOURCES

Quality pre-school services inevitably require investment and resources, capital and revenue. The financing is necessary not only for direct provision of services but also for infrastructure such as support services, in-service training, service development for target groups such as children with disabilities. This financial support could be directly provided to the services, or provided to community groups or consumers in the form of grants and subsidies.

- **What percentage of total revenue expenses is spent on services to young children?**
- **How much do different kinds of services cost?**
- **What are the parameters of calculating costs?**
- **Who meets the costs of services? The state? The local government? The parents? Employers? Charities?**
- **Can costs be calculated for not providing the services?**
- **How equally or unequally are these costs distributed between regions, communities or different groups?**

QUALITY ASSURANCE

# D. PLANNING AND MONITORING

This section refers to how policies are translated into daily practice. In no Member State does supply match demand, and demands themselves are not constant. The planning is about the achievement of targets within certain time-scales, the revision of targets, the quality of the information available in setting and revising plans, and the processes and procedures by which targets are set and developments and changes agreed.

- **What plans or strategies exist for putting policies into practice?**
- **At what level of Government do they exist?**
- **Do the plans also include the private and voluntary sector?**
- **Which personnel are responsible for these strategies?**
- **Who else is involved in the process?**
- **What time-scales exist?**
- **What indicators are used to assess need and demand for services?**
- **What indicators are used to measure the take-up of services?**
- **What indicators are used to measure the satisfaction of users with the services?**
- **How is the quality of the service assessed?**
- **How are services for target groups such as children with disabilities assessed?**

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## E. ADVICE AND SUPPORT

There is a difference between the inspection and monitoring of services, which provide measures of their effectiveness; and the advice and support which is offered to enable services to change, grow and develop.

- **Is there an infrastructure of support and advisory services?**
- **What range of support and advisory services exist?**
- **What specialist support services exist?**
- **Do they include health services?**
- **At what level of government are they administered?**
- **Is support and advice also offered to the private and voluntary sector?**
- **If there are private consultancies offering support and advice, how are they linked to public services?**
- **How are the support and advice services linked to inspection and monitoring?**
- **How are the support and advisory services linked to training?**

# F. STAFFING

The staff who care for and educate the children represent the single most important factor in establishing quality services. Staff who enjoy and feel confidence in their work, who are warm and caring towards children, and who provide a stimulating environment, ensure quality.

There are many manual, domestic and clerical tasks involved in looking after young children. The quality of service is also affected by the way these auxiliary tasks are carried out, and the staffing issues we raise also includes questions about these tasks.

- **What basic training is required of staff?**
- **What pay and conditions of service do staff enjoy?**
- **How are staff selected?**
- **What trade union agreements exist for staff?**
- **What negotiating forums exist for staff?**
- **What proportion of contact–non-contact time is agreed for staff?**
- **How are the duties of staff who are ill or sick covered?**
- **How hierarchical is the organization within the services?**
- **What facilities exist for staff?**
- **What proportions of men and women work in the services?**
- **Does the staffing reflect the make-up of the local community?**
- **What are the turn-over rates of staff?**
- **What opportunities for career development exist for staff?**
- **What in-service support and training exists for staff?**
- **Do requirements for staffing apply to the private and voluntary sector?**
- **Is there an interchange of staff between the public sector and the private and voluntary sector?**
- **Who cleans the premises?**
- **Who is responsible for any washing of clothes or furnishings?**
- **Who is responsible for the maintenance of the furniture and premises.**
- **Who is responsible for the maintenance of the outside space?**
- **Who is responsible for security?**
- **Who cooks?**
- **Who undertakes the clerical work?**
- **Is there any pre-service or in-service training required for any of these tasks?**
- **Are there any pay or conditions of service attached to any of these tasks?**
- **What kind of equipment is provided to undertake these tasks?**
- **How are these tasks integrated into the daily activities of the services?**
- **If these tasks are not integrated into daily activities, are the services less effective?**
- **How are staff selected to undertake these tasks?**

QUALITY ASSURANCE

## G. TRAINING

In this section we raise some basic questions about the relationship between **knowledge**, skills and aptitudes, experience and qualifications in assuring quality services.

- **Should all staff be trained?**
- **Can assessment take the place of training?**
- **What kinds of pre-service training exist in different services?**
- **Are both women and men encouraged and enabled to take up training?**
- **Are various racial, linguistic and religious groups encouraged and enabled to take up training.**
- **Are people with disabilities encouraged and enabled to take up training?**
- **What age of entry is there to pre-service training?**
- **Is there access for older men and women to training?**
- **Is training full-time or are their opportunities for part-time study?**
- **How long is pre-service training?**
- **What is the content of pre-service training?**
- **What age-range of children does the training cover?**
- **How didactic are the teaching methods in pre-service training?**
- **What is the academic level of pre-service training?**
- **Who controls and assesses training?**
- **Are the different kinds of training co-ordinated and integrated?**
- **Are targets set for the number of trained staff?**
- **Is pre-service training free?**
- **Are students in pre-service training financially supported?**
- **Is pre-service training related to pay?**
- **What in-service training exists?**
- **Who is responsible for in-service training?**
- **Is attendance at in-service training voluntary?**
- **Is in-service training in work-time or after hours of work?**
- **Is in-service training geared to the needs of the individual or to the collective goals of the services?**
- **Is in-service training available in the private and voluntary sector?**
- **Is there any post-qualifying or post-graduate training?**
- **What kind of financial support is available for post-qualifying training?**
- **Is post-graduate training linked to pay or promotion?**
- **Is training at any level linked to research?**



QUALITY ASSURANCE

## H. PHYSICAL RESOURCES

The daily environment experienced by young children affects the quality of their lives. Children who are cooped up with little opportunity for active play and movement experience an impoverished quality of life. Ensuring the quality of the space and the physical resources available in services to young children is an essential task.

- **Do standards at national or local level include regulations about inside and outside space?**
- **What capital finance is available for new buildings?**
- **What capital finance is available for rehabilitation?**
- **What proportion of the finance is spent on outside space?**
- **What compensatory activities are arranged if there is no outside space?**
- **Who is involved in the design of the buildings or accommodation?**
- **Does the design meet the criteria of all the quality indicators?**
- **Do the furnishings and equipment meet the criteria of all the quality indicators?**
- **Who chooses the furnishings and equipment?**
- **Who replaces the furnishings and equipment?**
- **Who is responsible for the overall maintenance of the buildings or accommodation?**

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QUALITY ASSURANCE

# I. RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Research is traditionally a rigorous examination of specific contexts or events. It can also be seen in a broader context, of encouraging and supporting staff and parents to systematically explore aspects of practice in their own nurseries or childcare settings which are problematic or warrant further development; for example bilingualism; or the use of art or puppetry as a means of expression.

- **Who finances research programmes for services to young children?**
- **Who decides the criteria for research programmes?**
- **How are the criteria arrived at?**
- **Who decides the methodology for research programmes?**
- **How is the methodology arrived at?**
- **What range of issues are examined?**
- **How does the research relate to policy at different levels?**
- **Who undertakes the research?**
- **How do researchers work with practitioners?**
- **How do practitioners work with researchers?**
- **How are the results of research disseminated?**
- **How are the results of research used?**
- **How is research linked to training?**
- **How is research linked to monitoring and inspection?**
- **How is research linked to support and advice?**

# J. INTEGRATION AND COORDINATION OF SERVICES

Finally, we consider how services to young children are organized in a coherent and co-ordinated manner. This refers to the co-ordination of the different kinds of services to young children, across care and education, between under threes and over threes, between private and public. It also refers to the co-ordination across levels of government, and the way in which policies and targets make sense at both state and at local levels; how they ensure national standards yet respond to the needs of widely differing communities. It includes the way in which other related services and benefits, for instance health services, or fiscal systems, take account of policies for services to young children.

The complexity of government, and the diversity of communities, means that contradictions are inevitable. We ask whether they need to be as extreme.

- **What contradictions about policies and priorities exist between departments at a national level?**
- **What contradictions about policies and priorities exist between departments at a regional or local level?**
- **How do the national and local policies relate to one another?**
- **What contradictions exist within departments (such as education) about the priority given to services to young children?**
- **What contradictions exist between the aims and objectives of services themselves at a local level?**
- **What strategies exist to address these contradictions?**
- **How do services for young children link up with systems of health care?**
- **How do fiscal policies affect families with young children?**
- **How do employment policies relate to families with young children?**
- **How do policies on equal opportunities relate to services for young children?**
- **How do environmental policies relate to the needs of young children?**

QUALITY ASSURANCE

# SUMMARY

Our aim in writing this discussion paper has been to deepen the understanding and agreement about services for young children within the European Community.

We have outlined 10 areas of quality as a basis for further elaboration. We suggest that more detailed quality indicators, both qualitative and quantitative, can be developed using each of these 10 areas or categories of quality.

These areas or categories of quality take account of three perspectives:

- **the quality of life of children**
- **the quality of services as perceived by their families**
- **the views of professionals.**

The way in which these areas of quality can be developed, and the priorities and perspectives which are emphasized, may vary between or within Member States. But nevertheless we believe that our categories are an essential and useful basis for developing services, and in devising strategies for their evaluation.

Assuring quality in services for young children is a gradual process of planning, administration, training, monitoring, advice and support at many levels. We have described some of the essentials of this process. We stress the need to invest in services, and to recognize fully the economic and social costs and benefits for those who work in the services and for those who use them.

We have also stressed the need to coordinate this process between micro and macro levels, and to establish parameters for taking decisions about services for young children.

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# QUALITY IN SERVICES FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

## A DISCUSSION PAPER

As part of the European Community's Third Action Programme on Equal Opportunities, the European Commission wishes to encourage an increased provision of good quality European childcare services. The publication of this discussion paper on quality in childcare services – prepared by the European Commission Childcare Network – is a contribution to this objective.

*Quality in services for young children* deals with two important and related questions. How should we define 'good quality'? What conditions are necessary to promote 'good quality' services? Answering these questions is important – but so too is the process involved in seeking answers.

*Quality in services for young children* is not an attempt to prescribe a single 'Euro standard' for childcare services. Europe is a plural community, with a wide variety of values, ideas and experience. Any discussion of quality must recognise and respond in a positive way to this diversity.

*Quality in services for young children* is intended to stimulate discussion and to assist the development of definitions of quality and of strategies to promote quality. The Commission welcomes comments on the paper itself and the subjects it covers.

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